

## **The Benefits of Vitamin D: The Sunshine Vitamin!!**

Thank goodness for our precious few days of sunshine in February and March to break up the winter grey skies and rainfall! Many North Americans have a phobia about getting too much sunlight and the harmful UV rays' effects on the skin; however, healthy amounts of UV light exposure on the skin are necessary for our body's ability to make vitamin D. This vitamin, found to be deficient in many North Americans (some studies recently show one half of subjects are deficient), has protective effects against many cancers (colon, breast), improves immune function and moods, protects against Type 1 Diabetes, rickets in children and newborns, autoimmune diseases such as multiple sclerosis and inflammatory bowel disease, and osteoporosis.

Research shows that humans need a minimum of 10 minutes of sun exposure 2-3 times a week to make enough vitamin D to prevent deficiency. If sunscreen is worn at all times, this will block the body's absorption of Vitamin D. Studies show that vitamin D levels are declining steadily in North Americans since the 1990's when sunscreen was advocated. The best dietary sources of vitamin D are salmon (530 IU per 3 ounces), tuna, and milk. However, the skin's production of vitamin D is more rapid and robust than the amount attained through dietary sources.

The main form of Vitamin D that circulates in the blood is called 25-hydroxycobalmin and this form of vitamin D can be tested in a lab. It is recommended to have vitamin D levels checked once a year. Also, pregnant women should have vitamin D levels tested, since if levels are deficient, newborns may be born with rickets (a disease which causes bones to break easily due to insufficient Vitamin D status of the mother). Naturopathic doctors as well as medical doctors have access to these lab tests. Ideally, levels should be between 50-80ng/ml year round. If blood lab levels are below 30 nanograms per ml, deficiency is diagnosed. According to the Vitamin D Council, Vitamin D Deficiency Syndrome (VDDS) exists when people have levels below 50 nanograms per ml along with two or more of the following conditions: osteoporosis, heart disease, hypertension, autoimmune diseases, certain cancers, depression, and chronic fatigue. Oral supplementation with 2000 IU of vitamin D in adults over 13, and 1000 IU of vitamin D in children under 13 year of age is the minimum amount required for those with deficiencies. The Canadian Cancer Society has recommended that everyone supplement with 2000-5000IU of vitamin D in the fall and winter months when sunlight exposure is scarce. .

There is much research done on the benefits of vitamin D supplementation:

- Studies show that people with seasonal affective disorder have improvements in depression symptoms when their vitamin D levels are increased.
- Studies show that children who supplement with Vitamin D have a decreased risk of developing Type 1 Diabetes.
- Vitamin D supplementation can improve your immune function to ward off colds, flu, and infections.
- Vitamin D supplementation can reduce muscle and bone pains in people with fibromyalgia and those suffering from the side effects of statin drugs (ie. Lipitor).

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- Recent studies show that there is a link between increased body fat, increased abdominal fat and vitamin D deficiency.

Enjoy the west coast sunshine when you can, to get your required dose of vitamin D! For more information on Vitamin D research I recommend the following website:

[www.vitamincouncil.org](http://www.vitamincouncil.org). For individualized consults and assessment of vitamin D status, please contact my office.